

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL: THE VOICE OF HOUSTON'S YOUTH

**In Commemoration of National Youth Service Day
Presented By the 2006-2007 Mayor's Youth Council**

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Mayor's Youth Council 2006-2007

PREFACE

The Mayor's Youth Council was started in 1998, to provide high school students the opportunity to develop leadership and citizenship skills while learning about city government. The MYC emulates the Houston City Council with a Council Chair, City Secretary, five (5) at-large and nine (9) district council positions and their accompanying senior aides. Additional positions of Chief of Staff and Special Events Coordinator have been added to involve more individuals on the Council.

Youth Council members develop a sense of personal growth and achievement, an understanding of city departments and a rapport with community leaders, citizens and elected officials. Members are called upon to help make decisions affecting Houston's youth as well as participate in numerous activities throughout the year. They hold a formal public meeting monthly, in the evening, in the Council Annex Chambers. They also plan a Town Hall meeting every 4-6 weeks in a high school or other community institution revolving around a predetermined topic, such as Teen Health & Wellness; Crime on and off Campus and How Teens Express Themselves. Each Council Member and Senior Aide is required to participate in a minimum of ten (10) community service events, some planned and organized by the MYC and some at the invitation of other organizations.

MYC members are selected to participate based on their application, a personal interview and their commitment to fully participate in and meet the objectives of the program. The term runs from September through early May. Family members have played a major role in making the MYC successful from ensuring their young student attends each meeting to participating in events themselves. Finally, the program is a success due to the support and encouragement of the Mayor and City Council members and their staff. MYC members get a first-hand view of their council offices by shadowing the Council Member and volunteering in his/her office during the year.

We are proud to transmit this second report from the MYC on issues important to Houston's youth. It has become an annual project around National Youth Service Day to provide a "voice" for Houston's Youth. We ask that our Mayor, City Council, other public officials and youth advocates review this information and address solutions in partnership with youth. We stand ready to assist and support.

Chair: Ana Vazquez-Trejo City Secretary: Zuri Davis Chief of Staff: Jana Hermann

Council Members:

At-large Position 1: Jessica Zhao
At-large Position 2: Andrea Roth
At-large Position 4: Charles Brown, III
At-large Position 5: Emily Benigno
District A: Cindy Dinh
District B: Sharita Palmer
District C: Zachary Garber
District D: Marquis Alexander
District E: Andrew Benigno
District F: Giselle Robleto
District G: Mahevish Virani
District H: Jesus Garza
District I: Alaina Fielder
(as of 4/07)

Senior Aides:

ArMon Funches

Peyton Davis
Alex Muniz
Margaret Belchic
Kristen James

Hallie Schaper
Damona Woodley

Introduction

Millions of youth will participate in National & Global Youth Service Day, the largest service event in the world, on April 20 - 22, 2007. They will tutor young children, engage in disaster relief, register new voters, educate their communities about good nutrition, distribute HIV/AIDS prevention materials and meet many more community needs through their service. National & Global Youth Service Day supports youth on a life-long path of service and civic engagement, and educates the public, the media, and elected officials about the role of youth as community leaders.

The 2006-2007 Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) launched a **Youth Survey** to identify the most important issues to Houston's youth to commemoration of the National Youth Service Day. Youth, who reside or attend school in the City of Houston, were given the opportunity to complete the survey to have their opinions heard.

This report is being done for three (3) reasons:

- to provide a voice for Houston's youth by sharing their most important issues with Mayor Bill White and City Council Members;
- to formally communicate the 2006-07 Mayor's Youth Council findings so that others may address issues relevant to their area of responsibility, and
- to participate in the 2007 National Youth Service Day.

*The report was developed through a 37-item survey divided into 6 categories:

- Community Out-of-School Programs
- Crime and Safety
- Prejudice/Discrimination
- Health Education and Outreach
- Traffic/Transportation, and
- Environment

These items were generated from the MYC members and advisors and many were based on issues identified through monthly Council meetings and Town Hall meetings. It was decided by the MYC that a 1-5 rating scale, one being the least important and 5 being the most important would be used.

Each MYC member was required to distribute and return thirty (30) completed surveys. The survey was also posted on the MYC website (www.houstontx.gov/houstonyouth) and could be completed on-line.* A press release and flyer were emailed and sent to schools and media. Besides surveys received on-line, MYC members gave the survey to students attending various events at which they were volunteering.

MYC members were required to compile the scores for their thirty surveys and write a summary report on their findings. Their surveys are also included in the overall total as well.* The on-line surveys were put into a spreadsheet in order to tally and analyze the findings.

** The following can be found in the appendix:*

- A copy of the survey.
- A summary from each MYC member
- A list of the totals for survey questions and average scores for each issue

Profile of Respondents

A total of 795 students from around the Greater Houston Area participated in the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) survey. These students represented 119 different secondary (middle and high schools) and post-secondary (colleges and universities) schools. The students that were surveyed attend schools in Houston ISD, Humble ISD, North Forest ISD, Spring Woods ISD, Fort Bend ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, and Aldine ISD. The top 10 high schools with the most students surveyed are as follows:

- 98 – Bellaire High School (Houston ISD)
- 29 – Spring Woods High School (Spring Branch ISD)
- 54 – High School for Performing and Visual Arts (Houston ISD)
- 44 – Lamar High School (Houston ISD)
- 37 – Stratford High School (Houston ISD)
- 35 – Aldine High School (Aldine ISD)
- 34 – Barbara Jordan High School for Careers (Houston ISD)
- 33 – Booker T. Washington High School (Houston ISD)
- 31 – Kinkaid
- 30 – Kerr High School (Fort Bend ISD)

There were only 33 students from three area middle schools and three area colleges/universities represented by the survey:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ▪ 3 – Dowling Middle School (HISD) | ▪ 2 – Houston Community College |
| ▪ 2 – Bammel Middle School (Spring ISD) | ▪ 2 – University of Houston |
| ▪ 2 – Key Middle School (HISD) | ▪ 1 – Stephen F. Austin State University |
| ▪ 2 – Pershing Middle School (HISD) | |

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Over 100 different zip codes were represented and all Council Districts were represented. The top zip codes were:

77079 - 48
77096 - 41
77401 - 40
77043 - 31
77080 - 24
77081 - 21
77021 - 20
77033 - 19
77088 - 18

Since exact addresses were not available, all council districts in a zip code were included. The council districts having the most students completing the surveys were:

- District B – 144 District C – 167 District D – 126 District G -136

There were a total of 795 students from around the Greater Houston area participating in the survey. A profile of these respondents is as follows:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
13	5	0.6%
14	59	7.4%
15	160	20.1%
16	224	28.2%
17	219	27.6%
18	119	15.0%
19	9	1.1%
	795	100.0%

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
8	28	3.5%
9	124	15.6%
10	210	26.4%
11	223	28.1%
12	205	25.8%
Freshman	5	.6%
	795	100.0%

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	332	41.8%
Female	431	54.2%
No Response	32	4.0%
	795	100.0%

Findings

Of the 795 surveys completed, the top two quartiles of issues concerning youth ranked by average score by average score with 5 being the most important were:

College Preparation	3.991
Employment Prep. & Jobs	3.869
Sexual Predators	3.701
Academic Tutorials	3.683

Surveyors were allowed to write-in other concerns and issues under each category. Write-in responses occurred in all six categories.

In **Community Out-of-School Time**, after-school activities was mentioned the most, followed by more art & crafts programs. Mentioned each one time were: teen counseling, students earning community service hours through after school clubs, improved education, racism in school, immigration, use of drugs during school hours, more political and social awareness, employment for youth, financial/college opportunities, safety, overcrowded school, vocational courses and homeless outreach programs.

In **Crime/Safety category**, mentioned by two individuals were: drug trafficking, rape, violence in schools, sexual predators (listed already in survey), domestic abuse and sexual harassment from teachers. Others mentioned by one individual each were: theft in school, animal control, crime on school property and alcohol.

Mentioned seven times in the **Prejudice/Discrimination categories** was preferential treatment from teachers. Others mentioned were respect for teachers, more use of "No Place for Hate" programs in schools and schools not allowing clubs that deal with discrimination.

In the **Health Education & Outreach Category**, the two most mentioned concerns were safe sex education and healthier food in schools. Others mentioned were: more exercise education, drug rehabilitation, health exams and help with depression, anxiety and other mental health issues.

Regarding **Traffic/Transportation issues**, making the HISD transportation buses available to more students, the Metro system need to be expanded and better road construction planning were each mentioned by two individuals. Receiving one mention a piece were providing Metro schedules and too much traffic around schools (ready listed).

Finally, regarding **Environmental issues**, recycling in schools was mentioned the most. Other write-in concerns were: total waste created by students, more students and teachers involved in park, beach, or bayou cleanup, keep the factory regulation legislation, emissions from automobiles, make more sewage and flood control things available, energy R&D, fuel economy and more planning for a Metro system that would reduce pollution.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the Houston Youth Survey, the following recommendations are made regarding the issues that were indicated to be the most important to youth living in the city of Houston.

Out-of-school activities, especially those that contribute to college preparation, ranked highest among the concerns of youth surveyed. While the city of Houston is independent of the school systems, it still can positively impact Houston's youth in their post-high school years. Specific topics ranking high within out-of-school opportunities include volunteer opportunities and academic tutorials, which aid in the college admissions process. The city should provide more opportunities that would encourage pro-active youth, serving the dual purpose of instilling civic duty and preparing students for college. Rather than have students rely on their individual schools for volunteer information, the city could act as a conduit for such information. The Youth Council believes that the most effective way of communicating this idea is to hold a city-wide college fair, similar in nature to the Youth Rules Rally at the George R. Brown Convention Center, but different in terms of the overall goal. With the establishment of the Mayor's Teen Task Force in 2004, the city has gained a valuable asset, but the idea has not reached its full potential. Revitalizing this program can help the city of Houston reach a greater audience. The issue of academic tutorials is a matter to be dealt with by the school system. However, a report from City Council could help influence the schools to provide more resources to this area.

Another topic of concern is youth employment. While it is noted that the city cannot generate new jobs at a whim, the Youth Council would like to underscore the value and necessity of yearly job fairs and would recommend an increase in its frequency. Continuing to support the annual Youth Rules Rally and Job Fair is vital. Creating intern opportunities, both paid and non-paid, for high school students is also important.

While crime has increased across the board, youth are most concerned with sexual predators in their neighborhoods. More officers on school campuses and in surrounding neighborhoods before and after school would provide extra assurance to students and their families.

Health in general is a significant issue facing area teens. In particular, STDs and healthy lifestyle education are two important issues facing the youth of Houston. A major obstacle in dealing with STD education and prevention is the independence of the school systems from the city government. District education lacks solutions to teenage sexual issues. Sex education curricula fail to mention contraception, abortion, and prevention techniques other than abstinence. While the districts are not accountable to the city, the city can work with school districts and city clinics to provide more education, thereby helping Houston's youth and other citizens as well. With regards to healthy lifestyle education, the city could offer more free city clinics to provide Houstonians with better health education. The city could work in tandem with local gyms, doctors, and exercise facilities to provide Houstonians with more options.

Pertaining to the city mandated youth curfew, the survey results concluded that a majority of Houston youth are aware of its existence. However the question asked in the survey did not provide the opportunity to voice their position on this topic. Perhaps this will be an issue for discussion next year.

Environmental concerns remain high on students' minds, in particular the issues of air, water, land pollution and available green-space in the urban areas. As Houston expands outward, more city commissioned parks and recreation facilities could also accompany this outward growth.

To control and minimize the effects of pollution, the city could enact new regulations in the areas of automobile exhaust and industrial output. While national standards exist, the city can easily make more stringent guidelines for companies to follow. The city could further stress the need for youth to maintain the environment by explaining the positive effects of public transportation.

While flooding and traffic affect the majority of Houstonians, both issues have had an especially large impact on Houston's youth. More and more of the city is being added to the floodplain, putting more and more families at risk for having their house destroyed. The only way to assuage youth is to provide more storm drains and methods of limiting flood damage—the city is already doing a lot to address this issue. In addition, the new roads under construction are being built with two purposes in mind: to limit the traffic congestion in and around Houston, and to limit the effects of floodwaters on the major arteries of Houston.

Communication is by far the greatest tool utilized by the city to address the concerns of our youth. The city must communicate ways in which kids can participate in city initiatives and demonstrate that it is open to youth input so that the youth of the city can feel they can make a difference. The city must take advantage of all forms of media and marketing in order to show city youth that the government cares. The Mayor's Youth Council is a great step towards open communication between youth and the city and pledges to pursue actively a more productive avenue of communication.

Conclusion

This is the second year that the Houston Youth Survey has been conducted. We hope to continue to build upon the knowledge gained from Houston's youth in order to better meet their needs and interests. Therefore, it is with pride and respect that we submit this report and recommendations to the Mayor and City Council, in hopes that it will assist them with their important work in serving the youth of Houston. We also hope the youth of Houston will know the Mayor's Youth Council is here to help and represent their voice in city government.

2006-2007 Mayor's Youth Council Members
(A complete roster can be found in the appendices)